

Two more Linear B inscribed stirrup jars from Malia

*“A guest remembers all his days
the man who received him.”*
(Hom., Od. 15, 54, 5)

This paper presents two more Linear B inscribed stirrup jars discovered in 1991 in Quartier Nu at Malia. After considering the archaeological and chronological contexts of the two vases and suggesting a reading of the inscriptions, some particularities of inscribed stirrup jars are highlighted. In the light of recent work by Haskell et al. and Duhoux, we consider their use as guest-gifts which served to openly advertise the person who gave the vase and its content. The relative scarcity of vases compared to their uninscribed counterparts, the visual stress given to the inscription, the elite find context and the preponderance of personal names are used to suggest that inscribed vases are personal reminders of actual guest friends and travels undertaken.

Before other adventures took the honoree to distant shores, the archaeology of Crete was his first field of exploration. His doctoral dissertation on Knossian Palace Style pottery¹ almost naturally pushed him into the debate on the date of the Knossos tablets, very much alive in the eighties.² Together with Erik Hallager,³ he defended a view diametrically opposing the then more traditional view defended by Boardman, Popham and others. Although this discussion has still not been conclusively settled⁴ and remains at the back of everyone’s mind when dealing with advanced Cretan Late Bronze Age, the discovery of Linear B tablets in proper LM IIIB contexts at Chania has adequately shown that this script was still being used during the early 13th century B.C.⁵ The implication is that stirrup jars inscribed with Linear B (henceforth ISJ’s) – for which a LM IIIB date has never been questioned – should, because of their date, at least in part reflect similar contexts to those treated by the Linear B tablets of Chania and no doubt some of the Knossian ones.⁶ A major question, however, that remains is whether tablets and ISJ’s reflect similar administrative practices, i. e. whether both were issued by a central administration. ISJ’s have been found at Chania, Knossos, Armeni and Malia with a fragment from the Mamelouko Cave in

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1 Niemeier 1985.

2 Niemeier 1982, 1983, 1986.

3 Hallager 1977.

4 Driessen 2008.

5 Olivier 1993; Hallager et al. 1990, 1992.

6 Driessen 2008.

Western Crete and one from Prinias in Central Crete.⁷ Here we present two more examples that have come to light during the 1989–1993 excavations in Quartier Nu at Malia.⁸

During the 1990 excavation campaign of the LM IIIA2-B building complex Nu to the northwest of the palace at Malia, two large transport stirrup-jars inscribed with Linear B were found and promptly published, together with petrographic and chemical analyses.⁹ Both vases were found in the west part of the complex, in Rooms IV1 (MA Z1) and II6 (MA Z2, Fig. 1). In 1991, two other inscribed stirrup jars were discovered in the east part of the complex, one (MA Z3) on the floor of Room X12 in the central section of the east wing while the top half of another stirrup jar (MA Z4) was found in Room X13, close to one of the main entrances of the complex. Both are presented here.

1. MA Z3: Archaeological context, inscription and chronology

Room X12 is a small, almost square room, measuring about 2.50 by 2.50 m, accessible from the south, from X7, where a 1.10 m long and 1 m wide sideropetra slab serves as a threshold (Fig. 2). In the south part of its west wall is an opening leading to Room X10 via a step made of small stones. The destruction layer within the room consisted of a hard, light brown soil with some specks of charcoal, burned earth and pumice lumps. Evidence for fire destruction was definitely not as clear as in the rooms more to the south where the earth was heavily burned black.  room itself partly served for storage for a series of vases and may also have been used for minor domestic industrial activities since a stone pounder was found close to the east wall and there was a nest of six stone pounders in the northeast corner.¹⁰ On the floor were also found a stone axe, several obsidian flakes and a bone tool. As indicated in the plan, there were flat slabs in several spots in the room, either serving as pot stands or perhaps as working platforms for an activity involving the stone pounders. With regard to complete vases, immediately to the northeast of the entrance a smashed, but complete squat stirrup jar (91.0570.1, Fig. 3) was found as well as a handled cup (91.0570.3, Fig. 4) and fragments of what proved to be a complete, plain amphora (91.0570.2). To the northwest of the entrance were found the foot, handles and spout of another, badly damaged stirrup jar (91.0569.3, Fig. 5), probably originally standing on a flat slab, with a mug close by (91.0569.1, Fig. 4). More to the north, the remains of another larger smashed stirrup jar were collected (91.0568.1, Fig. 6), which, once conserved, proved to be inscribed and was labeled MA Z3. Next to it were some joining fragments from a part of the body of a large closed shape decorated with stylized octopus tentacles (91.0568.2).

The inscribed vase MA Z3 is a large transport stirrup jar, which although largely complete, was in a poor condition (Fig. 6). This may be a combined result of its proximity to the surface and the inferior quality of its fabric and paint. It took all the skills of Mr Kostas Vittorakis to restore it in 1994.¹¹ In contrast to the earlier published MA Z1 and Z2 which were inscribed on the shoulder,

7 Zurbach 2006; Del Frio 2012.

8 For preliminary reports on the Quartier Nu, see *BCH* 113 (1989), 762–7; *BCH* 114 (1990), 912–9; *BCH* 115 (1991), 735–41; *BCH* 116 (1992), 733–42; *BCH* 117 (1993), 675–82; and *BCH* 118 (1994), 471–7. For general observations, see especially Driessen & Farnoux 1994; Driessen et al. 2008; Driessen & Farnoux 2011; Driessen & Fiasse 2011.

9 Farnoux & Driessen 1991; Day & Jones 1991.

10 Illustrated in *BCH* 116 (1992), 740, Fig. 15.

11 Mentioned and illustrated in *BCH* 116 (1992), 739, *BCH* 117 (1993), 681, Fig. 19.

stirrup jar 91.0568.1 (MA Z3) is inscribed on its belly. Unfortunately, most of the surface slip of the vase has disappeared, taking away with it most of the inscription (Fig. 7–8). Only one sign is more or less complete, another perhaps mostly so, whereas enough survives of a third sign on the other side of the belly to suggest that the inscription may originally have been quite long and ran around the vase. The fact that the inscription was actually located on the belly may also point to a rather long text, perhaps similar to TH Z839 or TH Z849–854. The first sign preserved is about 5 cm wide, the second roughly 6 cm with respective heights of 5.3 and 8.2 cm. There are ca. 5 cm between the first and second sign and then a gap of more than ca. 23 cm until the remains of the third sign. Rather than assuming that the first and last signs belong to a single word, it is more likely that several words originally adorned the vase. If the spacing between the signs was maintained and assuming a circumference of about 1 m, there is space for about 10 signs. As such, MA Z3 stands a chance of belonging to a category of ISJ's that is rare on Crete but occurs in particular at Thebes with isolated examples at Eleusis, Tiryns and Mycenae. They contrast with short inscriptions as, for example, on MA Z1 and Z2 and the bulk of the ISJ's found on Crete. Although the first sign is damaged and its reading is not entirely certain, we may tentatively read **ru** (AB 26) although **qi** (AB 21) and **ne** (AB 24) cannot be ruled out. The second sign does not present any difficulties and one can easily read a **ka** (AB 77). Of the third sign, located further, not much can be said as the sole trace preserved is a comma-like trait. This could be all that remains of a sign which included a right-turning arch or a rounded element (such as **ka**, **ko**, **u**, etc.) but since it is so high up in comparison with the first signs, perhaps it was simply a word divider. The first sign group can perhaps be read as]ru-ka[(if not]ru ka[or]-ru ka-[) and as such be compared to the anthroponym ka-ru-ka, perhaps attested at Chania (cf. KH Z1).¹² Although it cannot be excluded that the same person was intended, the inscriptions were not painted by the same hand however. If our reading is correct, the signs are less rounded than usually encountered on ISJ's. Indeed **ru** is often very curvy and **ka** is elsewhere regularly given wavy cross-stalks compared to the inscribed cross seen on MA Z3.

As to the chronology of MA Z3, the assemblage in room X12 allows a secure LM IIIB dating. The vase MA Z3 itself (91.0568.1) has a height of about 44.5 cm and a maximum diameter of 31 cm (Fig. 6). The jar has a semi-coarse orange-buff hard fabric, with medium and large-sized brown-purple inclusions. The surface is covered by a cream slip and decorated with red evasive paint of two large bands on the shoulder, a band encircling the stirrup and the spout, some illegible motives on both sides of the spout, and a circle on the disc. This inscribed stirrup jar is of a tall piriform/ovoid shape with a sloping shoulder and a flat base. Its belly shows a pronounced production ridge in its lower part. The spout is straight-sided and very close to the stirrup towards which it is slightly inclined. Petrographic analysis of MA Z3 allows for its attribution to a fabric group comprising three analyzed stirrup jars from Quartier Nu, which “tends not to contain any truly diagnostic material to pin down provenance more securely” (C. Knappett, unpublished study). Knappett noticed that on purely geological grounds this group could be local, but its relative rarity at the site might hint at a non-local source. A vase with similar typo-stylistic features comes from the last level of the “Maison des Vases à Etrier”, also at Malia.¹³ This complete transport stirrup jar (42 cm high) has a similar tall piriform/ovoid shape, is made in a pinkish-buff fabric and the two to three horizontal bands at the shoulder and lower body are painted in dark

12 The reading on KH Z1 is not certain however, although accepted by *CIV* 1979, Pl. LXI and Catling et al. 1980, 88, 109, but questioned by Hallager 1987, 174, n. 24 who suggests ka-qo-ka[.

13 van Effenterre & van Effenterre 1969, 112, A57, Pl. LVIII2.

brown. A comparable stirrup jar, though more globular in profile, was found at Kato Gouves and is dated to Late LM IIIB by Vallianou.¹⁴ Another transport stirrup jar from Knossos of about the same size is covered with an orange buff slip and decorated with two painted large bands on the shoulder.¹⁵

Among the vases found together with  is a squat stirrup jar (91.0570.1, 27 cm high, max. diam. 25 cm, base diam. 14 cm; Fig. 3). It has a buff rather soft fabric with medium-sized inclusions. Its cream slip and the red to dark brown paint have seriously faded. The decoration consists of a circle on the disc, two parallel vertical bands on the handles, a band at mid-height of the spout, a band encircling the stirrup and the spout, triangles on either side of the spout, three wavy bands on the back of the stirrup, and two groups of three bands on the shoulder and below the maximum diameter respectively. A similar vase also comes from Quartier Nu, Room X1 (90.0027.4) and another from the “Maison de la Façade à Redans”, again at Malia.¹⁶ Kanta illustrates a comparable stirrup jar from Episkopi Pedhiadhos and dates it to LM IIIB/C because of the wide flat base and the spout almost touching the stirrup, which is not the case for the documented vases from Malia.¹⁷ Other good comparisons can be found in a LM IIIA2-B tomb of Mochlos Asprospilia¹⁸ where the vessel shows a similar profile, though slightly less perked-up, and surface treatment and in a LM IIIA2-B tomb at Klima in the Messara.¹⁹ The present vase probably dates to the first half of LM IIIB.

A third medium-sized stirrup jar in this deposit (91.0569.3, 28 cm high, max. diam 20 cm) shows a piriform profile and a narrow high foot with a ring beveled base (Fig. 5). It is slipped in light buff and decorated with dark brown paint. The decoration consists of a circle on the disc, two vertical arched bands on the handles, a band on the shoulder around the stirrup and the spout, elaborate triangles with concentric arcs on either side of the spout, a central floral motive on the back of the stirrup with a least one simple rosette motive in the empty field, and three groups of three uneven bands on the shoulder, below the maximum diameter and on the lower body respectively. Again the best comparison comes from Malia itself, from the last level of “Maison Epsilon”.²⁰ Hatzaki has dated the assemblage from “Maison Epsilon” to which this vase belongs to LM IIIB Early²¹ and good comparanda, dated to LM IIIA2-B, exist at Mochlos,²² where one example shows an identical radiating flower motif at the shoulder zone, or Gournia.²³ These parallels are corroborated by a petrographic analysis suggesting a provenance from the Mirabello region for this vase of Quartier Nu (C. Knappett, unpublished study). A non-local stirrup jar found at Sissi, 4 km to the east of Malia, shows some similar technological and typo-stylistic features, although the Sissi vase is more elongated and a bit taller (c. 35 cm high) and painted with an octopus pattern.²⁴

14 Vallianou 1997, 340, Pl. CXLIC. This stirrup jar is presented as a LM IIIB Early vessel in Hatzaki 2007, 244, Tab. 6.4, referring to Hatzi-Vallianou 1995, Pl. 238β.

15 Popham 1964, 18–9, Pl. 4e; unknown provenance and not analyzed by Haskell et al. 2011.

16 van Effenterre & van Effenterre 1969, 101, Λ115, Pl. LIV.

17 Kanta 1980, 249–50, Fig. 28.1.

18 Smith 2010, 85, IIB.690, Fig. 47, Pl. 18.

19 Rethemiotakis 1995, 165, Pl. 38δ.

20 Deshayes & Dessenne 1959, 130–1, Pl. XLVII, 4.

21 Hatzaki 2007, 244, Tab. 6.4.

22 Smith 2010, 87, IIB.699, Fig. 49.

23 Boyd Hawes et al. 1908, Pl. X:3.

24 Langohr 2011, 187, Fig. 8.7a.

Also in the MA Z3 deposit is a mug (91.0569.1, 8.6 cm high, restored diam. at rim 10.2 cm; Fig. 4 left). It is in a fine, smoothed, yellow-orange fabric with dark brown paint unevenly applied in a monochrome surface treatment on the interior and exterior. The mug has a cylindrical shape with concave sides, a flat base and a vertical handle round in section. It is not impossible that it originally was a spouted tankard, similar to another unpublished decorated example from Quartier Nu or a LM IIIB Early example from the Palace of Knossos, also originally restored without its spout by Evans.²⁵ Contemporary tankards without a spout are usually higher and have pronounced concave walls.²⁶ The deposit also included a one-handled cup 91.0570.3, 8 cm high, rim diam. 15.3 cm) in a fine, smoothed pinkish-buff fabric covered with a cream slip, worn on the outside (Fig. 4 right). This large shallow cup shows an almost angular profile at mid-body and then a straight upper part, with a slightly everted rim narrowing inside. It has a strap, broad handle and a flat base. Popham illustrated similar plain examples from Knossos, one of them with a pulled out spout at right angle to the handle.²⁷ They are dated to LM IIIB Early.²⁸ The last complete vessel from this deposit is a not illustrated amphora 91.0570.2 (restored height 36 cm) in a semi-coarse red fabric with phyllite and quartzite inclusions. Amphoras that are plain or simply decorated with bands made in different fabrics are plentiful in the destruction deposits of both the west and east parts of Quartier Nu. Petrographic analysis of the present vase confirmed its local origin (C. Knappett, unpublished study). Finally the deposit also yielded a few joining fragments of the body and a grooved vertical handle of what was probably a krater decorated with stylized octopus tentacles (91.0568.2). All this material is well established in LM IIIB Early.

2. MA Z4: Archaeological context, inscription and chronology

Immediately east of Room X12, but not accessible from it, lies Room X13 (cf. Fig. 1). It is about 2.62 m wide and 4 m long. The room serves as some kind of vestibule to the east wing of the complex since it is immediately accessible to the east from the outside via a wide opening (1.35 m). It also served as anteroom for the large columnar room X11 to the south via a large, 1.10 m long threshold. It was hence a room through which people moved: this may have been the reason why it was found largely empty apart from a large grinding stone in ammouda, found upside down and hence 'resting'. This could mean that the room was also used for industrial activities since the grinding stone is too heavy to be moved easily. Apart from this large object, there were only a number of large ceramic sherds concentrated immediately east of the grinding stones in a mix of pumice and mudbrick fragments. Amongst these sherds was the top of a completely preserved stirrup jar (91.1555.2) which proved to be inscribed (Fig. 9–10). Somewhat to the south was a base, set within the floor, of another vase (91.1556.1). Especially in this part, the traces of burning were very evident and some parts of the floor were burned red. The destruction deposit found in Room X13 did not yield any whole restorable ceramic vessels. There are some kylix fragments and a part of a fragmented larnax with a panelled decoration of stylized octopus tentacles and undulating flame-shaped motives, possibly reused as a slab. They are of a LM IIIB date. The head of a Minoan figurine was also found.

25 Popham 1964, 19, Fig. 2, Pl. 7c; Hatzaki 2007, 239, Fig. 6.28:1.

26 Popham 1964, Pl. 7a–b; Popham 1970, Pl. 10a.

27 Popham 1970, Fig. 16.1; Popham 1984, Pl. 115:10.

28 Hatzaki 2007, 235, 242, Fig. 6.31: 2.

Only the top of the inscribed transport stirrup jar 91.1555.2 (MA Z4) is preserved. The inscription is on the shoulder of the vase, in the triangular zone between the spout and one of the handles and above the decoration of octopus tentacles. The decoration and inscription are rendered with the same paint. Although somewhat damaged to the right and fading, the inscription is complete but consists only of two signs. The left sign is 3.2 cm high and 2.6 cm wide and is formed by a branched sign that can be identified as AB 31 or  despite the absence of the short bars hanging midway from the branches which this sign usually has in tablets. The right sign is 3.7 cm high and preserved for a width of 2 cm with a damaged right side. Enough survives to assume an original circle with at least three preserved dots within – a fourth dot may have existed originally more to the right. It can be read as AB78 or  There is about 1 cm between the signs. The style of the drawing is fluent and seems to have been applied by somebody who was both apt in writing and painting. The sequence reads sa-qe which is a hapax but may, on comparison with the corpus of ISJ's, be interpreted as an anthroponym.

The vase MA Z4 has a preserved height of 24 cm and a maximum diameter of 32 cm. It is made in a semi-coarse buff fabric with dark inclusions. The painted decoration consists of octopus tentacles on the body, a band encircling the stirrup and the spout, two horizontal bands on the false-neck, a circle on the disc, an undulating line on the top of each handle and a band at the rim of the spout. The tentacles motif is interrupted by what seems to be the preserved top of an octopus head in the zone opposite to the spout. This vase belongs to a well circumscribed and homogenous fabric group of stirrup jars, amphoras, two-handled jars, pithoi, crater, and even a house model²⁹ identified by Knappett amongst the Quartier Nu material for which he observes “the same combination of sedimentary, metamorphic, and igneous rock fragments that is so characteristic of the flysch mélange and ophiolites of the south coast”, “somewhere between Myrtos and the east Mesara” (C. Knappett, unpublished study).

In summary, the ceramic material associated with the two ISJ's from the adjacent Rooms X12 and X13 clearly suggests a LM IIIB date at a mid/mature stage, but certainly not a particularly late stage as recently defined for LM IIIB2 Chania or LM IIIB Late Knossos.³⁰ This impression is confirmed by the numerous wholly restorable pottery collected in the last deposits of the remaining rooms of the east part of Quartier Nu. Therefore we suggest a LM IIIB Early horizon (1300–1250 BC) for the inscribed stirrup jars MA Z3 and MA Z4.

3. The Function of ISJ's

The function of ISJ's has been a topic of discussion since their first discovery with recent studies by P. van Alfen, J. Zurbach, Y. Duhoux and the different studies in the volume edited by H. Haskell et al.³¹ Whereas most have seen the Linear B inscriptions as some kind of AOC or quality label, informing the consumers who the producer of the original product had been and sometimes from where it had been shipped, van Alfen and Zurbach have argued that the inscriptions were part of a palatial type of administrative recording within the production process of the jars and

²⁹ Driessen & Farnoux 2011.

³⁰ Hallager 2003 (Chania); Hatzaki 2007, 245–8 (Knossos). This differs from an earlier chronological attribution (Driessen & Farnoux 1994, 60, 63) where we proposed a LM IIIB2 final destruction of Quartier Nu.

³¹ van Alfen 1997; van Alfen 2008; Zurbach 2006; Duhoux 2010; Haskell et al. 2011.

their contents, with the inscriptions being some “sort of serial or tracking number”.³² The names on the ISJ’s would be those of the (primarily) oil producers who delivered these vessels to a higher authority. Since of all ISJ’s the largest quantity was produced in the very west of the island³³ and a smaller number in Central Crete (North and South) but none elsewhere, the implication would be the existence of such a higher authority especially in West Crete, i. e. Chania, something which would agree with the LM IIIB tablets found there, and the survival of some authority in the centre of the island. The biggest flaw in this hypothesis is that most ISJ’s were not found in the producing areas but rather on the Mycenaean mainland. The proposed scenario usually implies some kind of recycling of the ISJ’s after their original use, something we find difficult to accept in view of the intentional permanence implied by the inscriptions.

In the light of the work of the above-mentioned authors, we may briefly summarize some of the more remarkable features of the ISJ’s. First of all, it is clear that proportionally few of the transport stirrup jars were inscribed. Within Quartier Nu, for example, more than 40 complete transport stirrup jars were found and only four of these were inscribed. This circumstance was recently stressed by Duhoux³⁴ and used to suggest that the presence of an inscription implied a special use of the container and distinguished the vase from those that were anepigraphic. Next, we may also note the usually prime position of the messages: of the about 180 ISJ’s known, about 60 carry the inscription on their belly, the others mainly on their shoulder. Although the belly inscriptions tend to be longer, there are also some quite long shoulder inscriptions. Those on the shoulder would be immediately visible for those looking at them from above, from close-by.³⁵ Only very few inscriptions are on poorly visible parts of the vase, such as the discs (TI Z30, KH Z3-13-16) or squeezed in between the decoration on the shoulder (TI Z9-27). Very few inscriptions occur on cups or bowls. In general, the message carried by the ISJ usually consists of a personal name and/or a toponym, occasionally combined into a larger formula (e. g. TH 853-846-854-849-851), or, rarely, an exclusive royal designation. Quite a few inscriptions, however, are said to be illegible³⁶ suggesting that these were applied by illiterates, probably the vase painters themselves. This should not be exaggerated, however, since the general meaning is usually clear apart from a few (late) cases (Deiras at Argos, Asine).³⁷ Moreover, the care given to the visual stress and the size of some inscriptions clearly suggest that most of the inscriptions were meant to be seen.³⁸ The message immediately attracts attention, surely its original purpose. Duhoux underlines their calligraphic nature.³⁹ Most importantly, the fact that the inscriptions were added before the vase

32 van Alfen 2008, 238; Zurbach 2006.

33 Haskell et al. 2011, 100, 123, Ill. 8.1.

34 Duhoux 2010, 49.

35 van Alfen 2008, 238.

36 van Alfen 2008, 237 suggests that 25% are illegible.

37 Raison 1968, 227–9.

38 Often the Linear B messages were visually accentuated by the colour of the paint: hence the Dark-on-Light or Light-on-Dark decoration on vases always includes the message which hence receives additional stress. Duhoux (2010, 49) further notes how the ISJ’s provide a large potential surface to be inscribed. Indeed, in many cases, including MA Z3, the inscriptions use very large signs. If we realize that Linear B signs (and Linear A for that matter) on tablets rarely are as large as 1 cm and often much smaller, the size of the signs on the ISJ’s is remarkable indeed. Many vases are about 50 cm tall and a fair number of inscriptions have signs around 6 to 7 cm tall with some being as tall as 15 cm where the inscription takes up one fourth or more of the available height of the vase, e. g. TI Z29 (10 cm), TH Z839 (15 cm), TH Z 846 (15 cm), TH Z 849 (12 cm), TH Z851 (15.5 cm), TH Z852 (13 cm), TH Z854 (12 cm), TH Z855 (13 cm) and TH Z960 (12 cm).

39 Duhoux 2010, 62.

was fired indicates that the inscriptions were not only meant to be permanently associated with the vase but also that they are the reason for producing the vase rather than the contents. As far as we know, this is a rather new feature in the Aegean. The Minoans had used larger, isolated signs as mason's marks extensively in their architecture and although Middle Minoan mason's marks were deep and heavily cut, resulting sometimes in quite impressive and almost monumental signs, these were often on sides of blocks that were not meant to be visible.⁴⁰ Moreover, they become smaller and more difficult to discern over time. Some Cretan Hieroglyphic and Linear A signs are proportionally written large e.g. on Chamaizi pots or stone libation tables but in each case the object is of small dimensions. A ritual use seems evident in these cases. Linear A seems not (or rarely) to have been used for monumental purposes, a function which script did have in some contemporary Near Eastern societies. Nevertheless, some Linear A signs (especially the logograms for wine, oil, etc.) are in some cases written large on clay containers, sometimes applied before the firing of the vase. As such this evolution towards a portable monumentality seems to echo a similar phenomenon to Palace Style jars which, during LM II, seem to have been used as portable frescoes, as objects that could change their environments but remain immediately understandable through a particular decorative code.

These different observations, the prime position of the message, written in large characters and sometimes protruding before the firing of the vase, and the fact that anthroponyms in particular are given seem to corroborate the hypothesis recently proposed by Duhoux who argued that the inscriptions were meant to enhance the prestige of the people they mention within and that vases with inscriptions represented gifts to Mycenaean dignitaries.⁴¹ We would take this even further and regard the ISJ's as some sort of monumentalized namecards. Duhoux rightly drew attention to the mentioning of oil as *ksenwíjon*, as guest-gifts in Pylian Linear B tablets, and discussed Near Eastern parallels. Guest-gifts are often exchanged on occasion of feasts and related ceremonial practices.⁴² Guest-gifts are very prominent in Homeric epics to such an extent that one may sometimes wonder whether they were more important than exchange through trade. S. Sherratt has especially underlined the movement of wine as guest-gifts in the epics.⁴³ The individuality of the gift and the biography attached to a particular object render it meaningful in a social network of entanglement.⁴⁴ The object is a *mnema*, a reminder of the person who gave it as a *kseinia*, a guest-gift. The addition of an inscription turned a simple transport container into a meaningful, biography carrying object. Homer stresses how "a guest remembers all his days the man who received him".⁴⁵ Were the ISJ's tangible reminders of such guest relationships?

The different *proxeny* relationships entertained by specific towns and individuals during the Classical and Hellenistic period surely developed out of the *kseinia* custom, the intimate guest-host relationships involving gift exchange, well attested in the epics and undoubtedly going back

40 Begg 2004.

41 Duhoux 2010, 58: "manifester de façon éclatante le prestige conféré par les noms de personnages importants qu'ils [= the ISJ's] mentionnent", and Duhoux 2010, 64: "La principale fonction des inscriptions les plus prestigieuses sur amphores mycéniennes à étrier me paraît dès lors avoir été d'abord sociale: elles accompagnaient, embellissaient, identifiaient et certifiaient des Mycéniens de rang élevé. Dans ces textes, la fonction de l'écriture était elle aussi *symbolique avant d'être communicative*" (our italics).

42 See the different contributions in Wright 2004.

43 Sherratt 2004, 307, 324.

44 Crielaard 2003; Grethlein 2008.

45 *Od.* 15.54-5, cf. Grethlein 2008, 37.

to the Bronze Age.⁴⁶ Sharing the view of Duhoux, it seems meaningful to stress that most ISJ's come from distinctive, elite contexts and that a close connection exists between the inscription on the stirrup jar and the context in which these vases show up.⁴⁷ They underline an immediate link between the person mentioned on the vase and the one in whose residence  vase has been found. The ISJ's are personal reminders of actual guest friends and travels undertaken. The different petrographic studies by Day, Jones and Knappett on the four inscribed stirrup jars found at Malia, Quartier Nu, suggest two to three different regional origins, in West Crete, South-central Crete and more generally Central Crete. In practice this would mean that the four vases found in Quartier Nu represent tangible reminders of the links the Maliots of Quartier Nu had with specific people in West-Crete (*ma-re-wa*) and Central Crete (*ko-no, sa-qe*). The resident(s) of Quartier Nu would have been given these vases on their travels elsewhere on the island by the named individuals in a similar way to Odysseus having received gifts from different Phaiakian lords to take home as guest-gifts before leaving Scheria. In the case of Beotian Thebes it would suggest one or more important Theban lords having travelled to West-Crete where he or they were entertained and, on departing, received gifts from specific individuals. Hence, a special link between West-Crete and Thebes was formed (not unlike the later proxeny relationships) whereas Mycenae seemed to have done the same with Central-Crete. Many ISJ's (albeit fragmentary) were found at Chania itself: some of which may illustrate lively local networks between upstart elites. Others may have been waiting to be given to visiting officials or lords from the Mycenaean mainland.

If the ISJ's do indeed reflect the Greek custom of guest-gifts, this may perhaps also explain why they are primarily a product of West and Central Crete, the two regions of the island to have first been Hellenised. By the time East Crete was Hellenised, ISJ's were no longer produced and guest-gifts may have become more conspicuous and might have  taken the form of metal objects as Homer remembers them,  the most part. If this interpretation of the ISJ's as guest-gifts is correct, the vases may have contained different quality products, but wine seems the best choice in view of the assumed feasting occasion during which the gift would have been handed over.

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⁴⁶ For Homeric gift-exchange, see Jones 1999, with references; for *proxeny*, see Knoepfler 2001.

⁴⁷ Duhoux 2010, 82, 85.

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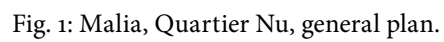




Fig. 3: Quartier Nu: Stirrup Jar 91.0570.1. P. Collet.



Fig. 4: Quartier Nu: Mug 91.0569.1 and One-handed Cup 91.0570.3. C. Papanikolopoulos.



Fig. 5: Quartier Nu: Stirrup Jar 91.0569.3. C. Papanikolopoulos.

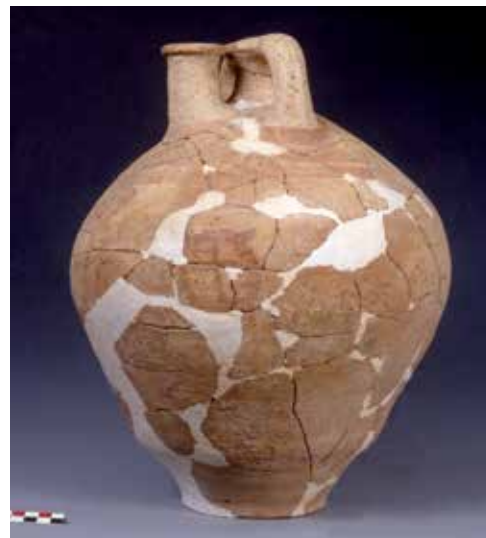


Fig. 6: Quartier Nu: Stirrup Jar 91.0568.1 (MA Z3). P. Collet.

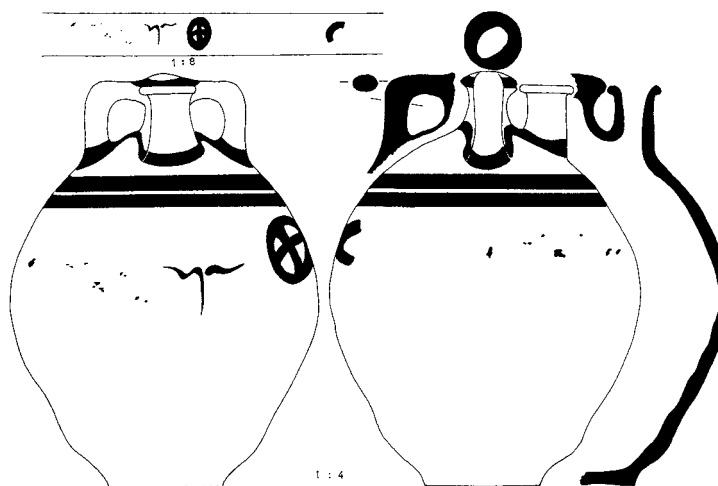


Fig. 7: Quartier Nu: Stirrup Jar 91.0568.1. Drawing by N. Dakouri-Hild.

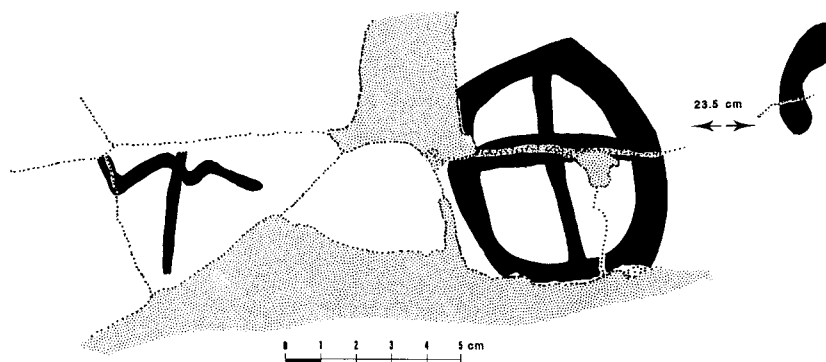


Fig. 8: Quartier Nu: Stirrup Jar 91.0568.1, detail of inscription. J. Driessen.



Fig. 9: Quartier Nu: Stirrup Jar 91.1555.2 (MA Z4). C. Papanikolopoulos.

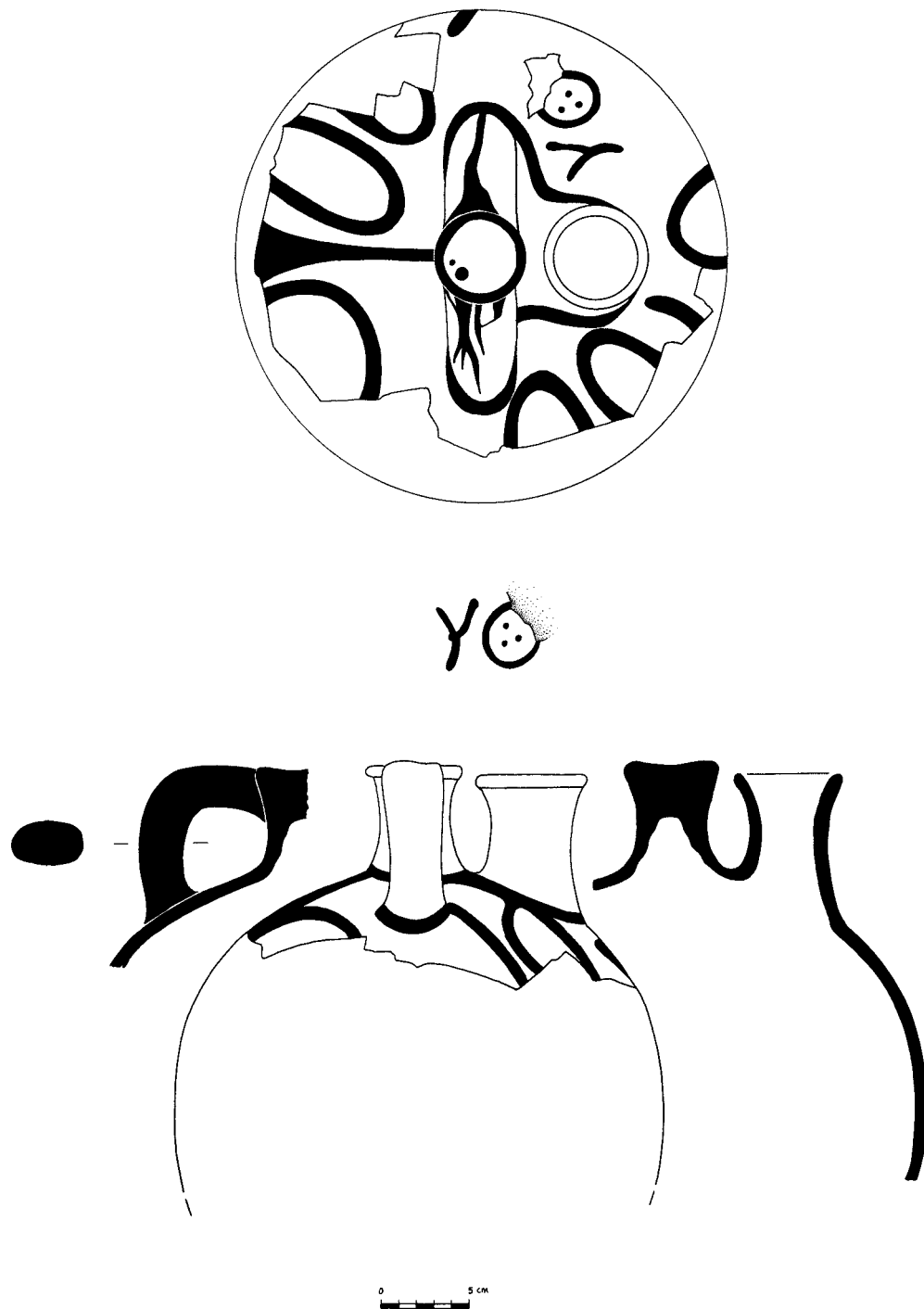


Fig. 10: Quartier Nu: Stirrup Jar 91.1555.2. Drawing by I. Bradfer-Burdet.